Nuclear Free Zone on the Korean Peninsula: A Russian View

Recommended Citation

Gennady Chufrin, "Nuclear Free Zone on the Korean Peninsula: A Russian View", NAPSNet Special Reports, May 31, 1994, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/nuclear-free-zone-on-the-korean-peninsula-a-russian-view/

Nuclear Free Zone on the Korean Peninsula: A Russian View

by Gennady Chufrin
Institute of Oriental Studies Moscow
produced for the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network managed by Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development Berkeley, California USA

Recently the international situation on and around the Korean Peninsula has become very strained because of widely spread suspicions about the nuclear program of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and alleged aggressive intentions of Pyongyang. In the Western press gloomy forecasts are abound predicting a possibility of a large-scale military conflict on the Peninsula. The DPRK is described as having a substantial military superiority over the Republic of Korea and the US government is called upon to prevent the North Korean attack on the South.

In order to see clearly through all these suspicions and allegations as well as to assess properly what is real and what is imaginary one has to step back a little and recollect the experience of the Korean war. When this war began in 1950 the military strength of the North was indeed far superior than the

defense capabilities of the South. And yet the war was not an easy affair for Pyongyang.

At first an unforeseen two day delay at the 38th parallel followed by a much longer stoppage near Pusan resulted in the loss of strategic initiative by the North, the loss which even the capture of Seoul could not offset. And when 50,000 US troops were landed at Inchon in the rear of the North Korean army the latter was forced to retreat hastily and in great disorder. After that the Korean war was fought predominantly by two major powers - the USA and China. When the hostilities were finally stopped and the armistice signed in July 1953 the warring parties found themselves again facing each other across the 38th parallel.

Even now, more than 40 years after the armistice, the Korean people remain divided by a 240 kilometer long and 5 meter wide wall along the demarcation line which speaks very

vividly about the futility of resolving the unification of Korea by force. If this became impossible at the time Pyongyang enjoyed political, economic and military support not only of China but also of the Soviet Union, at present after the collapse of the bi-polar world any military adventure on behalf of the DPRK is even less feasible and can be safely excluded as a real possibility of resolving outstanding problems between two Korean states.

Let us, however, look more closely at the strategic situation which exists now on the Korean Peninsula.

1.1. Military balance between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea.

a) Ground forces.

According to the available information the DPRK ground forces number 1 to 1.2 million men. They include 30 infantry and mechanized divisions, 15 armors, 20 mechanized, 4 infantry and 22 special combat brigades. They are armed with 3600-3700 tanks (including 100-200 light ones), 6500-6800 (100, 122, 130 and 152 mm) conventional artillery pieces, 9000 (82 and 100 mm) mortars, about 900 infantry fighting vehicles and 4000 armored personnel carriers. Besides the North Korean army has a large number of anti-aircraft guns and antitank guided missiles at its disposal.

The ground forces of the Republic of Korea number approximately 650,000 men. They consist of 3 mechanized, 19 infantry and 23 reserve divisions, several special combat and airborne brigades. Besides there are 3 anti-aircraft brigades and 3 separate tactical missile divisions. The South Korea ground

forces are armed with 2000 tanks, 1000 infantry fighting vehicles and over 1500 AFV, 4500 (105, 155, 175 and 203,2 mm) conventional artillery pieces and 5300 (81 and 106,7 mm) mortars. Besides there are 110 Hawk and 200 Nike Hercules launchers, a large number of anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns as well as 450 helicopters at the disposal of the South Korean army.

b) Naval forces.

The naval forces of the DPRK number 40,000-41,500 men. There are two operational fleets in North Korea equipped with approximately 600 surface combatants. However among them there are only 6 relatively large combatants - 3 frigates and 3 corvettes. The rest are small surface combatants that include 39 missile gunboats, 168 torpedo boats, 142 patrol boats and 180 landing ships. Such composition of the North Korean navy is determined by geography of the Korean Peninsula characterized by a complex coastal line and a large number of small bays that presupposes the use of small high speed vessels. The main task of such a navy is to disrupt naval communication lines,

to land small special combat and reconnaissance groups, to demolish ports of an adversary and protect its own ports and littoral infrastructure.

The main attack force of the DPRK navy consists of 24-27 middle class submarines whose task is to disrupt sea lanes in the Sea of Japan, Yellow and East China Seas as well as in the Korea straits. Besides there are 48 mosquito submarines for sabotage purposes in the North Korean navy.

The South Korean navy numbers 60,000 men including 25,000 marines. This composition of the naval forces reflects the experience of the Korean war when the South Korean marines participated in landing operations alongside the US troops. After the Korean war the South Korean naval forces continued to upgrade their interaction with the US Navy during annual Team Spirit military exercises.

The South Korean navy consists of three operational fleets, two flotillas and an air wing of naval aviation. Having fewer submarines than in the North Korean navy (3 to 27 respectfully) the South Korean navy outnumbers the North in surface combatants in the same proportion. The total number of large surface combatants is 66, including 9 destroyers, 7 frigates, 26 corvettes and 14 large and medium landing ships. Besides Republic of Korea has 97 speed boats, including 11 missile gunboats, 66 patrol boats and 20 landing boats.

The main task of the South Korean navy is to defend major sea lanes, ports and military bases, as well as to carry out landing

operations and sea blockades together with the allied navies of the USA and Japan.

The South Korean naval aviation consists of 20 patrol aircraft and 50 anti-submarine helicopters. There are three divisions of marines (including one reserve division) armed with tanks, amphibious armors personnel carriers, 105 and 155 mm conventional artillery and Harpoon missiles.

It is important to emphasize that South Korean combatants (especially large surface ones) are armed with more advanced weapon systems and have more sophisticated electronic equipment compared to the North Korean navy. Besides Republic of Korea has a large program aimed at bridging the gap with the North as to the number of attack submarines as well as at increasing its superiority in the number and quality of surface combatants and ASW aviation.

c) Air Force.

The North Korean air force numbers 70,000 men (compared to 40,000 men in the South Korean AF) and about 750 combat aircraft (compared to 500 combat aircraft in the South). One should not disregard however the superior quality of the South Korean air force both because of its more advanced weapon systems and better models of aircraft used (F-16 Fighting Falcons now and F-18 in the near future) as well as because of US air force presence on the Peninsula.

d) Reserve Forces.

The North Korean military reserves, military civilian services and militarized security forces are estimated to be 5.4 million. men. The comparable forces in South Korea are estimated to be 3.4 - 4.2 million men.

Summing up the results of the above comparison we come to the conclusion that while North Korea has a larger armed force (with or without the reserve forces) and enjoys numerical superiority over the South in the number of tanks, artillery pieces, mortars, combat aircraft and attack submarines, the Republic of Korea has a much larger Marine corps, has more surface combatants and ASW aircraft.

But what may be even more important is that the nominal superiority of North Korea in conventional weapons over the South is only 1.8 times while the share of military expenditures in GNP in the North is almost 50 per cent compared to only 6.5 per cent in the South. That means that the military industrial complex in the South is far more efficient, a fact that will become even more obvious in case of any prolonged military conflict between

the North and South. If on the other side the North plans a short war it is unclear how it can win it without having a classical threefold superiority in conventional weapons recommended for offensive operations. Moreover a 1.5 times superiority of the North in the number of artillery pieces is substantially reduced by more powerful artillery systems of the South while its superiority in the number of tanks is effectively offset by more effective anti-tank weapon systems in the South as well as by a large number of helicopter gunships deployed there.

It has been already mentioned earlier that the South Korean air force has a clear advantage over the North Korean air force. As to the naval forces of two Korean states, the

North Korean navy though having more submarines is rather vulnerable to air attacks of ASW aircraft because of insufficient air protection of its major naval bases. At the same time the South Korean navy will enjoy superiority in the number and fire power of its surface combatants.

Lastly, more powerful amphibious forces of the South are able, if its naval and air superiority is established, to ensure successful large-scale landing operations of the Marine Corps.

Of course, the deployment of a major part of the North Korea armed forces within 100 km from the demarcation line as well as a strategically vulnerably geographical location of Seoul may be of a certain advantage to the North. However as may be judged from the experience of the Korean war an occupation of Seoul does not guarantee a victory in a warfare. Besides while preparing for a possible attack from the North the South Korean army has deployed about 350 thousand troops, i.e. over half of its total strength, around the capital. Moreover, it is totally unclear why the US forward deployed forces in Japan and South Korea itself (i. e. over 83 thousand men, 200 combat aircraft and 15 surface combatants) would be unable to react timely and efficiently in case of an attack from the North.

Under such conditions the only possibility for the North to achieve a decisive military superiority over the South may appear if the Northern armed forces launch a very

powerful missile attack against all major ports, air fields and military bases in the South. Such a possibility however may be real only if DPRK possesses nuclear weapons and means of its delivery. Let us then consider such a possibility.

1.2. Nuclear weapons: possible scenarios of their deployment and use.

An issue of nuclear armament is closely connected with an

issue of its delivery. As is known surface-to-surface ballistic missiles of various ranges are considered to be the most effective means of nuclear weapons delivery. It is also known that the major nuclear powers, i.e. the United States and Russia, have practically stopped now to use tactical nuclear weapons delivery systems including nuclear-capable artillery, tactical missile launchers and tactical aircraft. According to SALT-I and SALT-II agreements there are also restrictions imposed upon the use of tactical sea-launched cruise missiles as the means of nuclear weapons delivery. That leaves practically only ICBMs and strategic aircraft as major nuclear weapons delivery systems in the United States and Russia.

However, already in 1990 according to the available information about 30 countries were armed with various types of short-range and medium-range delivery systems with range capabilities up to several hundred kilometers. And there are already a lot more threshold states that are prepared to follow their example. This phenomenon reflects current changes in the geostrategic situation when the confrontation

between two superpowers has been replaced by an ever increasing competition at the regional level between local actors. Modernization of delivery systems in these countries moves in the following forms:

* through the use of foreign know-how and foreign experts (Egypt, Argentina);

* through the development of ballistic missiles on the basis of national know-how (Israel, India, Pakistan, Brazil);

* through modernization and upgrading of foreign made missiles along with development of local tactical missile launchers (Iran, Iraq, North Korea and South Korea).

Since the development of national nuclear capability is usually unpopular among the local population and for those countries that have became a party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) such activities are a gross violation of its provisions, nuclear research and creation of nuclear weaponry are conducted under conditions of great secrecy and without any control not only from international agencies but also from national public opinion. Such indeed may be the situation on the Korean Peninsula as suspected by international community.

What kind of missile launch systems do the DPRK and Republic of Korea possess at present? Officially the North Korean armed forces have 70 tactical missile launchers at their disposal. Most likely these are somewhat modernized Soviet or Chinese tactical

missiles imported from China. They are, however, rather outdated and their range capability does not exceed 150-200 km.

However in May 1993 North Korea carried out a test flight of a new Rodong-1 missile. Being launched it covered the distance of 480 km in the direction of Tokyo and fell down in the Sea of Japan. This missile is capable of delivering a nuclear, biological or a chemical war head. To all probabilities this missile is a modified version of a tactical Scud missile that became well-known during the Persian Gulf war. The test flight of Rodong-1 proved the fact that its range capability is enough to reach US military bases in Japan and even threaten Tokyo, which means that the DPRK possesses now a modern launch system potentially capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

One should not overlook, however, that the Republic of Korea also possesses a modern delivery system which is even more powerful than that of North Korea. At the beginning of June 1993 South Korea launched a Science-1 space rocket which though officially described as a civilian one can easily be used for military purposes.

Officially the South Korean armed forces have in their possession 12 US built Honest John launch systems which are outdated and have been replaced in the US Army long ago. However in 1975 South Korea bought in the United Stated a plant for production of solid fuel missile engines which was then transported from California and assembled in South Korea. Already in 1978 first successful tests of unguided surface-to-surface missiles with the range of 35 to 150 km were carried out. Then that production of guided air-to-air missiles was organized. At present South Korea assembles at this plant modern guided missiles with all necessary electronic guidance systems out of local parts and materials and in accordance with a US licence. The mere fact of launching a space rocket by South Korea in June 1993 clearly proves its superiority in missile-building technology over the North.

The principal difference between strategic position of two Korean states lies in the fact that while South Korea enjoys a US "nuclear umbrella" protection, North Korea has to create such an "umbrella" on its own.

As is known the US troops deployed in South Korea are armed with aircraft and missile launchers capable of delivering nuclear weapons. The US forward deployed forces in Japan as well as in the Pacific (including the 7th fleet) are armed with nuclear weapons which may be used in accordance with the US decision. It is well known that this US nuclear capability is far superior to any military capability of North Korea or even to its nuclear capability if it really exists at all.

What is actually known, however, is the following:

a) North Korea has seven nuclear sites at the Yongbyon complex capable of producing nuclear weapons. After the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) carried out several inspections of nuclear installations there in accordance with the provisions of the NPT its experts voiced certain suspicions regarding two nuclear storage sites. However the DPRK not only declined the IAEA request to conduct special inspections of these two suspected nuclear sites but in March 1993 declared its withdrawal from the NPT.

b) At about the same time numerous reports appeared in the South Korean and international press about an allegedly increasing military and nuclear threat coming from North Korea. According to these press reports Pyongyang after creating the second nuclear reactor has developed a capability of producing annually up to seven nuclear war heads. It has been also reported that the North possesses enough facilities to produce also chemical weapons and means of their delivery.

c) At the end of December 1993 the New York Times published an article which contained a leak from the US secret sources about North Korea having 12 kg of plutonium which was sufficient for production of two nuclear bombs.

Leaving aside for a while an issue of reliability of these press reports let us assume that the DPRK indeed possesses a small amount of plutonium and is capable to increase its production for the creation of nuclear weapons. Let us also consider the military aspects of the possible deployment and use of such weapons by the DPRK.

Acting on these assumptions one must state that from the military point of view the North Korean army command should undertake such actions that would prevent the South Korean from carrying out successful landing operations in major South Korean ports and military bases (as it happened during the Korean war). For that purpose the North Korean armed forces should demolish such ports and bases in the South as well as establish a blockade of the US forward deployed forces in Japan (see endnote 1).

It is quite obvious that such a task is unattainable for the DPRK. The number of major military bases and sea ports in South Korea, such as Pusan and Masan sea ports, Chinhae, Mokpo, Pohang, Cheju, Inchon naval bases and air force bases in Pusan, Pohang, Chinhae, Kunsan to name only a few of them, is far more and above the possible (two) number of nuclear bombs in possession of North Korea. And that is without mentioning Seoul since it is located within the range of North Korean artillery fire.

As of now North Korea is capable of arming only tactical missiles and - at the most - tactical aircraft with nuclear war heads and bombs. However the range of those tactical missiles is insufficient to reach most of the South Korean bases located at the Southern tip of the Peninsula, i.e. over 300 km from the DMZ. Neither small naval vessels can be used for deployment of nuclear weapons, nor available artillery is capable of launching nuclear shells.

In other words, even if the DPRK indeed has only two nuclear war heads at its disposal, its armed forces are unable from the military point of view to carry out successfully the principal strategic task. And if, as it is discussed now by Seoul and Washington, the United States are actually going to deploy Patriot air-defence missiles in South Korea, then a possibility of an effective nuclear attack by the North against the South is reduced almost to zero.

North Korea can possibly change this balance of forces in its favor only if it attains a capability of manufacturing at least seven nuclear warheads annually. However the reaction of neighboring countries, and above all Japan, to such a situation is quite predictable.

According to the information coming from official Japanese sources the total amount of processed plutonium available in Japan in 1993 amounted to 1.6 tons. Besides 2.9 tons of Japan-owned plutonium is stored for reprocession in France and Britain. The total amount of unprocessed plutonium in the form of nuclear fuel already used

or still being used at nuclear power stations in Japan is estimated to be 27 tons. It is quite clear that to reprocess this plutonium to weapons-grade form will present no problem for Japan. And one must not forget that Japan already possesses modern missile technology.

Having said that one logically reaches a conclusion that if North Korea is indeed in the process of creating its nuclear weapons capability it is doing so because one (or both)

of two following reasons. The first one of them is dictated by a desire to create a situation preventing any reasonable possibility of an outside military attack on North Korea and thus defending the existing political regime from an overthrow by force by a potential aggressor. Creation of the North Korean nuclear deterrent capability is thus aimed at making a military conflict between the North and the South a virtual impossibility given the relatively small size of the Korean Peninsula and a very high degree of exposure of its

population to the consequences of a nuclear war.

The second reason behind an alleged North Korean nuclear program may be of a completely different nature, i.e. formed by the desire of Pyongyang to use it as a political threat or pressure in order to achieve better political and economic terms in its dealing with Seoul as well as with the United States and other Western countries.

The DPRK and Republic of Korea signed a Non-Nuclear Declaration in December 1991 which was aimed at creating an atmosphere of mutual trust between them on the nuclear issue. However almost immediately talks between the two Korean states on practical measures to realize this Declaration came to a dead end because of fundamental differences between the North and South on the problem of bilateral control measures over the implementation of nuclear safeguards.

Thus Republic of Korea believed that in order to create a nuclear-free zone on the Peninsula it would be insufficient to hold only the IAEA inspections and demanded the right to inspect not only nuclear but also military bases and installations in North Korea. This approach to the nuclear issue was interpreted however by the DPRK as an attempt by the South to conduct military intelligence operations in the North while withholding inspections by North Korean authorities of the US military bases in the South. The North Korean approach on the nuclear issue stemmed from its belief that the issue itself was originally created by the United States when they deployed their nuclear weapons in South Korea in the 1970s. Therefore inspections of the US military bases in the South were necessary especially since the US authorities neither denied nor confirmed the existence of nuclear weapons there.

On the other hand the DPRK after joining the NPT in 1985 spent over six years instead of mandatory 18 months on discussing conditions of regular IAEA inspections before actually allowing them. Moreover when the IAEA raised suspicions about two nuclear sites at Yongbyon and demanded their special inspections Pyongyang, as it was already mentioned, declared its withdrawal from the NPT in March 1993.

After that and especially after the resumption of the US-ROK joint Team Spirit military exercises in 1993 negotiations between the North and the South were completely broken. The ROK together with the United States tried in response by every political means at its disposal to bring the DPRK back to a negotiating table and to accept its conditions for nuclear safeguards. On top of that Seoul explored various scenarios of applying economic pressures on Pyongyang that might have included coordinated actions with Japan and even China. However Seoul was prepared to make

concessions too, such as, for instance, scaling down the size of Team Spirit exercises that normally involved up to 100 thousand US and ROK troops, large number of aircraft and naval vessels. Also political guarantees of nonaggression were offered to the DPRK as well as the development of economic relations with Japan and the United States much sought after by Pyongyang (see endnote 2).

It is a clear case of a stick and carrot policy to which the DPRK is now much more vulnerable than ever before when it enjoyed a powerful support of the Soviet Union and China. There is no more Soviet Union now while China though remaining an ally of the DPRK follows a very cautions policy towards North Korea and does not support its intention to acquire nuclear weapons.

The political vulnerability of the DPRK has been increased by its deteriorating economic condition. Poor harvests in the last few years have severely depleted its food stocks. A sharp decline of oil imports from the former Soviet Union has resulted in a steep decline of production of fertilizers, reduction in the number of aircraft flights and disruption of transport services.

Though the share of military expenditures exceeds half of the total GNP of North Korea, even the army faces now increasing difficulties that include more severe food rationing of soldiers and imposition of strict limits on fuel consumption.

The economic and external political difficulties have been further increased by the growing domestic political tension and unpredictability of Kim Jong Il, a new North Korean leader, of whom very little is reliably known while he has come now in control of many vital spheres of the DPRK domestic and foreign policy. Some observes even believe that under present deteriorating political and economic conditions and without former restraining influence of the Soviet Union and China on the decision making process in Pyongyang the new leadership there may indulge into a risky game of using its nuclear program as a means of political survival.

Thus acting on a seemingly correct assumption that the United States was prepared to make serious concessions in order to prevent the DPRK withdrawal from the NPT Pyongyang engaged Washington into a direct dialogue leaving aside not only South Korea but even its negotiations with the IAEA. In its dialogue with the United States the DPRK set down several conditions for the resolution of the nuclear issue, that included:

a) a formal obligation of the United States not to use nuclear weapons against the DPRK;

b) a formal declaration by the United States of the complete withdrawal of the US nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula;

c) a discontinuation of Team Spirit exercises;

d) conclusion of a peace treaty that would replace the present armistice agreement;

e) a denunciation by Washington of its treatment the DPRK as a "terrorist state";

f) support by the United States of the Korean unification on the basis of a confederation.

These conditions appeared to be quite realistic or at least much more realistic than earlier ones with a probable exception of the last one. Thus the DPRK does not demand any longer an immediate full diplomatic recognition by Washington or the speedy US troops withdrawal from South Korea or the US assistance in replacing its outdated nuclear reactors.

As to the US response to the DPRK policy on the nuclear issue it may be characterized as a combination of diplomatic efforts with economic and military pressures on Pyongyang. Thus the US government agreed to start a direct dialogue with the DPRK at a critical moment when the DPRK-ROK negotiations were broken and North Korea declared its withdrawal from the NPT. The first round of the US-DPRK talks was held in New York in June 1993.

As the result of this and subsequent rounds of talks an agreement was reached between Pyongyang and Washington in February 1994 which envisaged the resumption of the IAEA inspection of North Korean nuclear sites while the United States promised not to hold Team Spirit exercises in 1994.

However this agreement was shortlived. Already in March 1994 representatives of the IAEA who arrived in North Korea to conduct inspections accused Pyongyang of refusing to allow them to visit some of its nuclear sites. The reaction of the US government to this was violent though predictable. The US authorities confirmed their plans to deploy Patriot missiles in South Korea and to hold Team Spirit exercises as originally planned. The US government actions included also a suspension of US troops withdrawal from South Korea, an intensification of intelligence data collecting as well an appeal to the UN Security

Council to condemn North Korea.

At the same time the US administration started preparations for a more active defence support to South Korea in accordance with

the provisions of the mutual defence treaty of 1954. Moreover Senators Nann and Lugar were reported to propose the re-deployment of US tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea.

As to the reaction of another great power, China, to the developments in and around the Korean Peninsula, it is more cautious and ambivalent. Though remaining a formal ally of the DPRK and refusing to support any economic sanctions against it China regards negatively nuclear proliferation and does not approve any steps of North Korea in this direction. A positive role can be played by China in the current crisis not by joining possible economic sanctions against North Korea but by using its political influence on the DPRK in the classical style of quiet diplomacy.

At the first glance Japan takes a very clear and unambiguous stand on the Korean nuclear issue. It supports its principal allies, i.e. the USA and ROK, in their political efforts and favors an establishment of a nuclear-free zone on the Korean Peninsula. At the beginning of April 1993, a delegation of the Japan Socialist party visited Pyongyang and criticized the North Korean decision to withdraw from the NPT (see endnote 3).

However after the test flight of the Rodong missile in the direction of Tokyo the Japanese government has changed some of its previous attitudes towards the nuclear issue. Thus it has been announced that Japan is going to reconsider its position on the long-term prolongation of the Non-proliferation Treaty when this problem will be raised in 1995.

What may become even more serious is Japan provoked by North Korea beginning the development of its own nuclear weapons. So far Japan has refrained from undertaking its

own military nuclear program because its security has been adequately guaranteed under the USA-Japanese Treaty. The Japanese government continues to regard this Treaty as a mainstay of its foreign policy. However the Treaty security provisions may be considered insufficient under emerging new geopolitical conditions and challenges, such as a nuclear threat from North Korea.

As to the Russian policy on the Korean nuclear issue it passed through several stages during the last two years. While continuing to remain highly critical of the North Korean approach to that issue and of Pyongang intentions to withdraw from the NPT, Moscow moved from being merely supportive to the United States, South Korea, Japan and other nations in their condemnation of North Korea to assuming a more active stand on the evolving situation. That change of policy approach resulted in the proposal to hold multilateral

negotiations on the Korean nuclear issue that would include not only North Korea and the United States but also other parties whose national interests are directly involved, such as Russia, China, Japan and, of course, South Korea. The reasoning behind this proposal may be explained by a serious disillusion felt in Moscow with the results of the US-North Korean dialogue on the issue which is considered to be highly sensitive to Russian security concerns (see endnote 4).

2.2. The changing role of nuclear-free zones under changing geopolitical conditions.

The idea of establishing nuclear-free zones (NFZs) dates back to the period of Cold War. At first there was an increase in the number of nuclear zones (i.e. zones where nuclear weapons were deployed) followed by a movement in favor of creating NFZs. In 1961

the world was put on the brink of a nuclear war as a result of the Cuban crisis. Fortunately a prompt political compromise was reached between Moscow and Washington. Soviet nuclear weapons were withdrawn from Cuba in return to the US guarantees of Cuban sovereignty. One of the positive results of this compromise to the outside world became the re-emergence of Latin America as a nuclear-free zone which was formally recorded in 1967 in the Treaty of Tlateloco.

So far it remains to be one of the very few examples of a NFZ the status of which has been respected by nuclear powers (the only other two successful examples of NFZs known to the author of this paper are Antarctica and Greenland). In other parts of the world - South Pacific, South-East Asia, Middle East, etc - that aspired to become nuclear free the actual results were far less satisfactory or even completely negative.

One such example is the story of the South Pacific NFZ. In August 1985 Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and other members of the Pacific Forum agreed to create a nuclear free zone and as a result the South Pacific NFZ Treaty was signed in Raratonga. This Treaty prohibited deployment of nuclear weapons on the territories or within territorial waters of member states as well as dumping of nuclear waste and conducting of nuclear tests in the zone area. The five nuclear powers were asked to support the Treaty, to sign corresponding protocols to that effect as well as not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against any of the parties to the Treaty.

However in the still prevailing atmosphere of the Cold War a reaction of the nuclear powers to the Raratonga Treaty was far from uniform. Thus the Soviet Union and China signed protocols to the Treaty as requested while the United States and Britain

refused to do it and France completely disregarded the Treaty continuing its nuclear testing program at the Muroroa attol.

Similarly a proposal to create a NFZ in South-East Asia put forward by the ASEAN states as far back as in September 1984 could not be realized until the Cold War was finally over and the US military bases at Subic Bay and Clark Field in the Philippines where the US nuclear weapons were reportedly deployed were closed. As to the Middle East or the Mediterranean Sea area where creation of NFZs was also proposed many years ago no progress has been achieved so far.

With all those differences among NFZs prosed or realized during the Cold War period their major similarity lies in the fact that their status centered on prohibition of nuclear tests and deployment of nuclear weapons. As can be seen in the case of the South Pacific NFZ, however, such, zones, even if created, remained handicapped unless all five

nuclear states agreed to respect it. Therefore lately it has been realized that NFZs may be much more effective is they become an integral part of collective or cooperative security systems.

2.3. Prospects of a NFZ on the Korean Peninsula.

The analysis of the political and strategic situation on the Korean Peninsula made earlier brings us to the conclusion that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union the DPRK lost a very powerful political, economic and military support and seemed to have chosen a nuclear option to compensate this loss as a guarantee of its security. If that assumption is correct then one must unequivocally state that such a policy is extremely risky, highly adventurous and in fact futile. Our analysis of possible scenarios of future developments brings us to the only conclusion that North Korea cannot under any conditions achieve a military victory over South Korea in the event of an open conflict. But even if the DPRK-ROK conflict remains in the present latent form it creates an atmosphere of a dangerous unpredictability on the Korean Peninsula and in North-East Asia that may result

in a nuclear proliferation and even a nuclear conflict.

One may safely predict that if Japan, provoked by the developments in North Korea, decides to go nuclear, Russia and China will react with the utmost concern. One may express serious doubts that such a course of events would correspond to the national interests of the USA.

To prevent such undesirable developments the concerned countries should apply more pressure on the DPRK leadership

but only up to a certain point since introduction of comprehensive economic sanctions to say nothing about threats to use force against Pyongyang may become politically counter productive. Therefore a continuation of the direct US-DPRK dialogue seems to be one of the most feasible and effective instruments of bringing the DPRK leadership to desired results. Without doubt a promise of an economic assistance coming from the USA on certain very concrete political conditions may be very helpful in the negotiation process especially since the DPRK now is in a very serious economic situation.

However, if this dialogue fails, as the present situation suggests, in order to reach an acceptable and lasting agreement on peace and security on the Korean Peninsula, that will involve a creation of a NFZ there, more energetic multilateral efforts by both Korean states, the USA, Russia, China and Japan should be undertaken that may finally result in an international conference on Korea and establishment of a cooperative security system in North-East Asia.

ENDNOTES

1. Here as elsewhere, I have tried to convince readers that the DPRK is unable to launch a conventional or nuclear attack with any reasonable chance of success; this view is also expressed by General Kolesnikov, chief of the Russian Army GS.

2. After the second round of the US-DPRK talks (February 1994) was concluded with a four-point agreement on the resumption of the IAEA inspections and of the North-South dialogue as well as on discontinuation of Team Spirit exercises, the first deputy Foreign Minister of North Korea made a statement on March 4 which called the USA to stop nuclear threats and hostile policies against the DPRK; to assist it with light water reactor technology; and to improve the US-DPRK relations.

3. Indeed, at the beginning of 1994 there were reports in the Japanese press accusing Russia and its nuclear and missile experts in assisting the DPRK in its nuclear military program. To make these accusations credible a certain secret document allegedly issued by the Russian Defense Ministry was referred to. However, the Russian government rejected these press reports as completely false.

4. As to Russian nuclear forces in the Far East, their size and structure are maintained in accordance with principles of the national doctrine of defense sufficiency as well as with the provisions of the US-Russian START agreements. Their purpose is to serve as a nuclear deterrent to either of three major possible threats to Russian national security that may come from North-West Pacific, Russian-Chinese border or Korean Peninsula. The

backbone of this nuclear deterrent is constituted by SSBNs equipped with long-range SLBMs that can operate successfully not only from the open sea but also from Russian coastal waters. Since this nuclear force is now practically the only effective deterrent against possible security threats it makes, in my opinion, the Japanese proposal of a NFZ in Northeast Asia that will encompass among other areas Littoral Siberia completely unacceptable for Russia.

View this online at: https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/nuclear-free-zone--n-the-korean-peninsula-a-russian-view/

Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org